

**Statement of Isabel V. Sawhill**  
**President, National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy and**  
**Senior Fellow, The Brookings Institution**  
**Testimony Before the Senate Finance Committee**  
**“Issues in TANF Reauthorization: Building Stronger Families”**  
**May 16, 2002**

I am pleased to have the opportunity to testify today on proposals to reauthorize the 1996 welfare reform law. As President of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy I especially want to address the family formation goals of the legislation. The National Campaign is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, chaired by former Governor Tom Kean. We are fortunate to have a Congressional Advisory Panel that includes several members of this Committee (Senators Breaux, Conrad, Jeffords, Kyl, and Snowe,). The mission of the National Campaign is to improve the well being of children, youth, and families by reducing teen pregnancy by one-third over a decade. I also serve as a Co-Director of the Brookings Institution’s Welfare Reform and Beyond Initiative. I should emphasize, however, that my testimony today reflects my own views and not the views of any organization with which I am affiliated.

Over the past six years, the National Campaign has been working on a variety of fronts to reduce teen pregnancy in the United States. We work with states and communities, with the entertainment media, with faith based organizations, with schools and other youth-serving and parent organizations. We reach out to these entities in a wide variety of ways such as offering technical assistance to community coalitions, commissioning and publishing research, sponsoring conferences, designing and launching national media campaigns, and training and working with youth leaders from around the country.

**The National Day to Prevent Teen Pregnancy**

Our primary focus in recent months has been creating and promoting an online quiz for teens designed to get them to stop and think about the consequences of sex and to make a personal connection to the risk and reality of teen pregnancy. Launched on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2002, as part of the first-ever National Day to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, the quiz has already attracted over 37,000 teens and is being used to catalyze additional activities and discussion of this issue throughout the month. The National Day and online quiz have succeeded with the help of our 80 National Partners, including such organizations as the National Conference of State Legislatures, Big Brothers, Big Sisters, The American Medical Association, and *Teen People* Magazine. In addition, Governor Engler of Michigan has sent a letter to every Governor in the country (**Appendix A**), and at least seven states have already issued proclamations, recognizing the National Day. Finally, both the U.S. Senate and House have introduced resolutions in support of the National Day. **Appendix B** includes a more detailed list of examples of activities catalyzed by the National Day.

**Teen Pregnancy Rates**

So far, our work seems to be paying off. Teen pregnancies have been on the decline since 1991. Most experts agree these declines are due to both less sex and more contraception among teens. However, there is still much work to be done. Approximately 4 in 10 teenage girls get pregnant at least once before age 20, and the United States still has the highest rates of teen pregnancy and births among comparable nations. The most recent federal data show that teen birth rates went up in 11 states between 1999 and 2000. Teen pregnancy and childbearing costs the taxpayers a minimum of \$7 billion a year yet we are investing very little to prevent it.

### **Emerging Answers**

The good news is that we now know how to address this problem. This past May, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy released a comprehensive research review written by Douglas Kirby, called *Emerging Answers: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy*. Kirby identified several rigorously evaluated programs that have reduced teen pregnancy rates by as much as one half. He found that in addition to sex and HIV education programs that help delay sex or increase contraceptive use, youth development programs that involve teens in community service with good supervision are also very effective.

The Campaign has always supported what could be called an ‘abstinence first’ message. Abstinence is the first and best choice for young people, but we also favor educating teens about contraception as well. This approach is consistent with the views of the majority of adults and teens in this country. We suspect that some of the abstinence education programs that are currently funded may eventually prove to be effective (although there is little evidence of this so far), but in the meantime we urge the Congress to support a broader range of efforts in keeping with the philosophy of state flexibility that was the hallmark of the 1996 legislation. Congress may wish to signal its support of abstinence as a value. But it makes little sense for the federal government to dictate the content of the curriculum in this or any other area.

### **Link Between Preventing Teen Pregnancy & Marriage**

Two of the goals of the 1996 law were reducing out-of-wedlock births and encouraging the formation of two-parent families. If we are serious about achieving these goals, the teenage years are the right place to start. For although 70 percent of all births outside of marriage are to women over the age of 20, half of *first* non-marital births are to teens. Thus the pattern tends to start in the teenage years, and, once teens have had a first child outside of marriage, many go on to have additional children out of wedlock at an older age.

For these reasons, the decline in teen pregnancy and birth rates during the 1990s has contributed directly to a leveling off of the proportion of all children born outside marriage. The relationship between the two is shown in **Figure 1**.

The decline in out-of-wedlock childbearing leads in turn to fewer people going on welfare, to fewer single parents, and to less child poverty. These relationships are depicted in **Figure 2**. They are based on research indicating that 8 out of 10 teen births take place outside marriage, that 8 out of 10 young unwed mothers ends up on welfare, and that 65 percent of all those families started by a teen mother are poor.

The Administration and many in the Congress are eager to experiment with programs that encourage marriage. One problem with this strategy is that most teens are not ready to get married. In fact, teenage marriages are twice as likely to end in divorce as marriages among people in their mid-twenties. So unless we can prevent early childbearing, efforts to encourage marriage are unlikely to achieve their ultimate objective of producing stable families.

In addition, research shows that once a woman has had a child outside of marriage, her chances of marrying plummet. Daniel Lichter of the Ohio State University finds that the likelihood that a woman of a given age, race, and socioeconomic status will be married is almost 40% lower for those who first had a child out of wedlock (and 51% lower if we exclude women who marry the biological father within the first 6 months after the birth). By age 35, only 70 percent of all unwed mothers are married in contrast to 88 percent among those who have not had a child. <sup>(1)</sup> The reasons unwed mothers are less likely to marry are unclear. They may be less desirable marriage partners, may be less likely to spend time at work or in school where they can meet marriageable men, or may simply lose interest in marriage once they have children. Moreover, having had one child out of wedlock, they appear to be relatively uninhibited about having additional children in the same way. In short, early unwed childbearing leads to less marriage and more illegitimacy. Thus, one clear strategy for bringing back marriage is to prevent the initial birth that makes a single woman less marriageable throughout her adult years. Most young women aspire to marry and publicizing their reduced chances of marrying once they have a baby might make them think twice about becoming unwed mothers.

Encouraging marriage is an important social goal, but one of the most effective and least controversial ways to accomplish this goal is to insure that more young women reach the normal age of marriage having finished school, established themselves in the workplace, and done both without having a child. The chances that they will then have children within marriage, that the marriage will be a lasting one, and that their children will receive good parenting will be much greater. At the same time, as Wade Horn notes, too many teen pregnancy prevention programs may have left the impression that it's fine to have a baby without being married as long as you wait until you're age 20. What needs to be stressed is not just preventing teen pregnancy but accomplishing various life tasks, such as completing one's education and finding a lifetime partner before becoming a parent. Young people accomplish these tasks at different ages but few are ready before their early twenties at best.

### **What Congress Can Do to Help**

If Congress is serious about curbing the growth of single parent families and encouraging strong marriages, there needs to be a serious effort to reduce early, out-of-wedlock childbearing. Specifically, the National Campaign recommends the following as part of welfare reform reauthorization:

- # Make sure teen pregnancy prevention is prominently mentioned in key parts of the law such as the purposes, grants related to family formation and healthy marriage, and state plans. Messages matter and Congress needs to signal strongly to the states that teen pregnancy prevention is a priority.
- # As part of any family formation fund, provide explicit funding for programs to prevent teen pregnancy. This money should support programs that have proven to

be effective based on strong research. We should be spending at least \$100 million to help save some of the \$7 billion that teen childbearing costs the nation each year. These investments in prevention are a cost-effective use of taxpayer dollars. While states have increased their efforts to reduce teen pregnancy in recent years, available data show states are spending less than one percent of their TANF funds on teen pregnancy prevention-related activities and this is likely to go down as TANF funds are needed to meet increased work requirements.

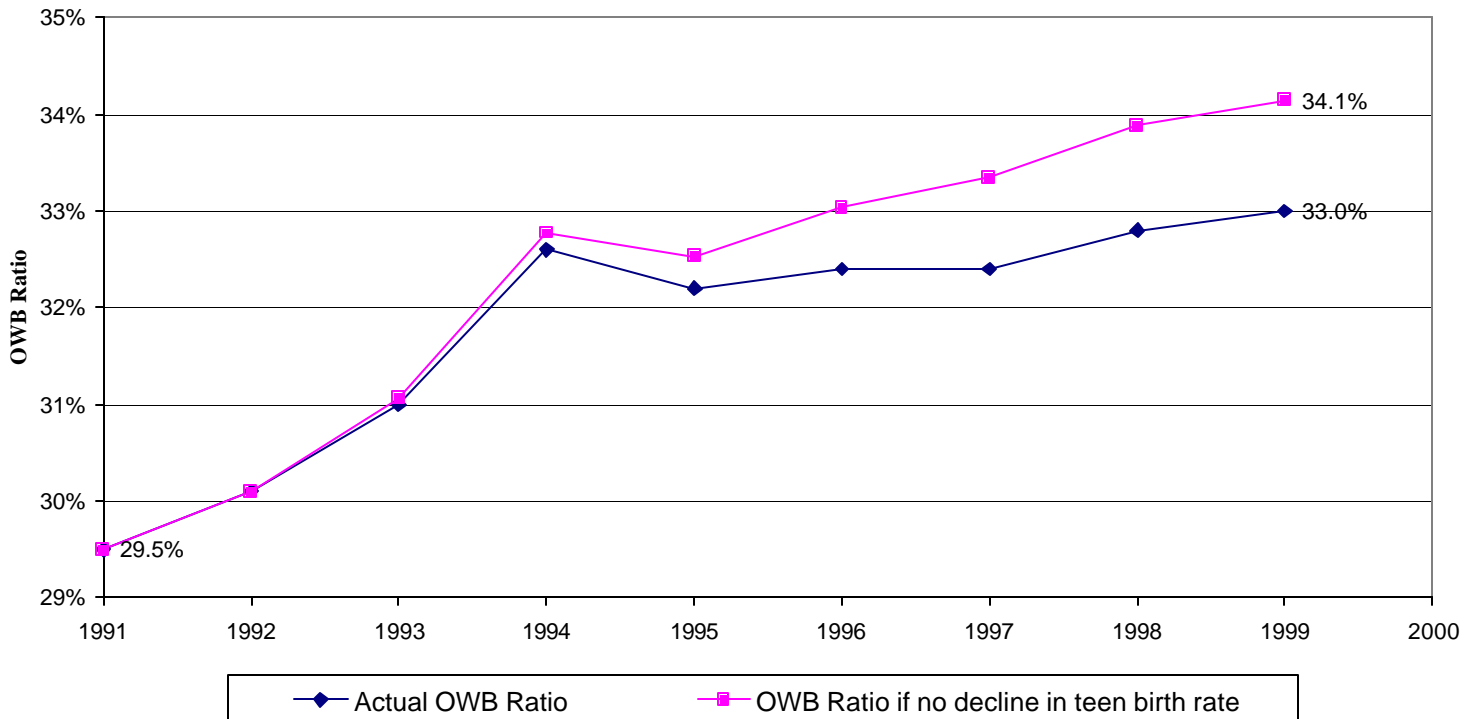
- # Establish a teen pregnancy prevention goal. For example, legislation could call for a 25% reduction in teen pregnancy over the next decade and provide rewards to states that achieve the greatest success.
- # Support a national resource center to collect and disseminate research and best practices to states and communities about effective and promising programs.
- # Fund a national media campaign and efforts to work in concert with the entertainment industry to change the messages embedded in popular culture.

Unlike encouraging marriage, reducing early, non-marital births is something we actually know how to do. Although some of what needs to be done is controversial, it is much less so than the pro-marriage agenda that some now tout. According to the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, the American public is not in favor of the government developing programs that encourage people to get and stay married. Indeed, 79% prefer that the government “stay out” of such activities. Only 18% favor the idea. The group most in favor of this agenda is highly committed white evangelicals but only 35% of this subgroup favors government involvement in encouraging marriage while 60% remain opposed. In contrast, in polling done in April, 2001, the National Campaign found that over 90% of American adults believed that the number of teen pregnancies in the United States was a serious problem. Teen pregnancy prevention is clearly a problem that the public wants Washington to address. It’s a problem that we know how to prevent. I urge Congress to provide the resources that states and communities will need if we want more children to grow up in stable two-parent families.

i Daniel T. Lichter and Deborah Roempke Graefe, “Finding a Mate? The Marital and Cohabitation Histories of Unwed Mothers,” *Out of Wedlock: Trends, Causes and Consequences of Nonmarital Fertility*, eds. Lawrence L. Wu and Barbara Wolfe (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2001) 329.

**Figure 1: Contribution of Teen Birth Rate to OWB Ratio, 1991-1999**

Source: Brookings analysis of data from the National Center for Health Statistics, *National Vital Statistics Reports*, Vols. 48 (2000), 49 (2001).



**Figure 2: Teen Pregnancy Prevention's Connection to Other Issues**

- If we have fewer teen pregnancies (100 ↓)
  - There will be fewer teen births (55 ↓)
  - and fewer abortions (45 ↓)
  - Which means fewer nonmarital births (44 ↓)
  - Which leads to fewer single parents (44 ↓)
  - fewer welfare cases (35 ↓)
  - and fewer poor kids (56 ↓)
- Why conservatives should care: 45 fewer abortions and 35 families avoid welfare dependency.
- Why liberals should care: 56 children and their mothers avoid poverty

**Appendix A: Please see attached letter.**

**Appendix B: Excerpted from the Kaiser Family Foundation's Newsletter, May 8:**

In an attempt to persuade teenagers to "stop, think and decide" what actions they will take to avoid unintended pregnancy, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, in collaboration with Teen People magazine and Teen People Online, has declared today the first National Day to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. The event, which coincides with National Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month, has been endorsed by more than 80 organizations and features an online effort to get teenagers to "make a personal commitment" to postpone pregnancy and parenthood until they are adults. According to the NCPTP, more than one million American teenagers get pregnant each year, and although the U.S. teen pregnancy rate is now at its lowest in 20 years, it remains the highest among industrialized nations (NCPTP Web site, 5/6). NCPTP communications director Bill Albert noted that "[fewer teens are having sex, and those that are use contraception a bit more carefully." However, he continued, "Is it still true that we should be concerned about this issue? The answer is, absolutely" (Bragi, San Francisco Chronicle, 5/6). Today, teenagers are being encouraged to visit the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy's Web site to take a short online quiz, which asks teens to determine the optimal responses to various "realistic" situations involving peer pressure, "out of control" parties and gossip (NCPTP release, 5/1). Twenty-two teenagers on the Campaign's Youth Leadership Team proofread the quiz to make sure that the wording and situations would be "believable" to teens (Wendland-Bowyer, Detroit Free Press, 5/6). The quiz's purpose is to help teenagers foresee "risky" situations and to make a plan ahead of time to help them avoid pregnancy.

Getting the Word Out

Sponsors of the day chose to create an online event because about 73% of U.S. youth ages 12 to 17 use the Internet, meaning that e-mails and instant messaging could allow for "widespread dissemination" of information about the online quiz. Actress and talk show host Ricki Lake, who is also an event partner, today will host a special episode of The Ricki Lake Show focusing on "the challenges of teen pregnancy and parenthood." Lake is also launching a new teen pregnancy prevention public service announcement today, and she will discuss teen pregnancy prevention as a guest on the ABC talk show The View (NCPTP release, 5/1). Channel One, a television-based news service whose educational programs are viewed in many U.S. high school classrooms, and Fox's family comedy "Grounded for Life," will both air episodes today relating to the issue of teenage pregnancy (NCPTP Web site, 5/6). Teen-related Web sites Sex, Etc., Katrillion Media and YouthNOISE are also featuring content on their Web sites related to the day (NCPTP newsletter, Spring 2002).

Legislative Support

NCPTP Senate Advisory Panel Co-Chairs Sens. Joe Lieberman (D-Conn.) and Olympia Snowe (R-Maine) have introduced a Senate resolution declaring today National Day to Prevent Teen Pregnancy and "urging" Congress to do more to prevent teen pregnancy in the United States. "We know that teen mothers are less likely to complete high school, and more likely to end up on welfare. We know that children of teenage mothers have lower birth weights, are more likely to perform poorly in school, and are at greater risk of abuse and neglect. And we know from reliable estimates that teen pregnancy is costing the nation \$7 billion a year," Lieberman said. He

added that as Congress prepares to rewrite the 1996 welfare reform law, he and his colleagues are examining provisions that will increase teen pregnancy prevention funding and reward states that decrease their teen pregnancy rates (Lieberman release, 5/7). Rep. Eva Clayton (D-N.C.), who co-chairs the NCPTP's House Advisory Panel, is sponsoring a House resolution in support of the day (NCPTP Web site, 5/6). In recognition of the day, U.S. Rep. Juanita Millender-McDonald (D-Calif.) has drafted a letter encouraging all female Democratic members of the Congressional Caucus on Women's Issues to "take action" to prevent teen pregnancy in their districts, and the National Conference of State Legislatures Executive Committee has endorsed the day and other efforts to highlight teen pregnancy prevention in the media (NCPTP Web site, 5/6).

### Prevention Events Around the Nation

The following is a list of some of the city- and state-sponsored activities that are scheduled today in observance of the National Day to Prevent Teen Pregnancy: \*Arizona: Child & Family Resources, Inc. in Sierra Vista, Ariz., is creating an "abstinence only" display at an area high school to provide information on the National Day to Prevent Teen Pregnancy and abstinence "incentives" and to showcase teen pregnancy prevention posters created by local teenagers (NCPTP newsletter, Spring 2002). \*Massachusetts: During the month of May, Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts is providing to all interested parents or guardians a free copy of Robie Harris' book, "It's Perfectly Normal," which is designed to "foster" conversation about sex between parents and their teenagers (PPLM release, 5/1). \*Michigan: Teenagers from the Wayne-Westland Community Teen Pregnancy Prevention Project today will visit local places where their peers "hang out" to tell them about the online quiz and to encourage them to sign an "abstinence pledge" or to practice safe sex (Detroit Free Press, 5/6). In addition, Michigan Gov. John Engler (r), chair of the National Governors' Association, has sent a letter to all governors encouraging them to recognize and promote the day in their states (NCPTP Web site, 5/6). \*Nebraska: The Lincoln-Lancaster Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Coalition is sponsoring "Lunch & Learns" at area businesses to better equip adults to communicate with teenagers, and it is sponsoring displays at the State Capitol advertising the day. Throughout the month, the organization is mailing postcards with information about teen pregnancy and parent-teen communication strategies to more than 85 government, business and school leaders in the area (NCPTP newsletter, Spring 2002). \*New Mexico: At its annual meeting today, the New Mexico Teen Pregnancy Coalition will honor New Mexico counties that achieved a 20% reduction in teen birth rates during 2000. The NMTPC will also release a new report, titled, "Bridging Our Past, Present, Future: Teen Pregnancy in New Mexico" (NMTPC Web site, 5/6). \*New York: Planned Parenthood of New York City will provide computer access at two sites for teens who wish to take the online quiz (NCPTP newsletter, Spring 2002). \*North Carolina: In recognition of the day, a Wake County school board committee scheduled a meeting yesterday to discuss its School Health Advisory Council's recommendation that health educators be allowed to teach about "a variety of sex-related topics," including the use of contraceptives, in addition to encouraging abstinence among teenagers (Fulton, Raleigh News & Observer, 5/6). \*Ohio: Cincinnati Children's Hospital's Postponing Sexual Involvement (PSI) program will issue a press release today on the sex education responsibilities of adult family members and will sponsor an adult roundtable on teen sexuality in recognition of the day (NCPTP newsletter, Spring 2002). \*Texas: Planned Parenthood of Houston and Southeast Texas is hosting a day of teen pregnancy

prevention activities, including a presentation to be held tonight at a Houston church (Houston Chronicle, 5/6)

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